

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Friday, September 30, 2005

Contact: Drew Nannis (202) 225-5065

**STARK COMMENTS ON DRUG PLANS**

WASHINGTON – Today, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services released specific state-by-state information on the Prescription Drug Plans (PDPs) and Medicare Advantage plans that will participate in the new Medicare Part D drug program.

In California, there will be 47 stand-alone Medicare Prescription Drug Plans and 113 Medicare Advantage plans. Most of the 113 Medicare Advantage plans are regional plans that are available to only a small portion of the state's residents. Detailed information about where each plan is offered is not yet available. Nor were overall premiums for the Medicare Advantage plans released by CMS today.

"CMS felt compelled to release some details about plan offerings today because tomorrow plans will start bombarding beneficiaries with marketing materials," Stark said. "That's the case even though beneficiaries won't receive their Medicare & You Handbooks until later in the month.

"The information provided today is not sufficient for anyone to make a choice regarding which plan, if any, may best meet their needs.

"Today's release highlights my overriding concern that Medicare beneficiaries are going to find this array of choices overwhelming. My advice to Medicare beneficiaries and those trying to help them remains: Take your time, check your facts and know your options. Most importantly, no one should give out any personal information to marketers who contact them by phone or through other means."

Here in California, beneficiaries can call the Health Insurance Counseling and Advocacy Program for help at 510-839-0393.